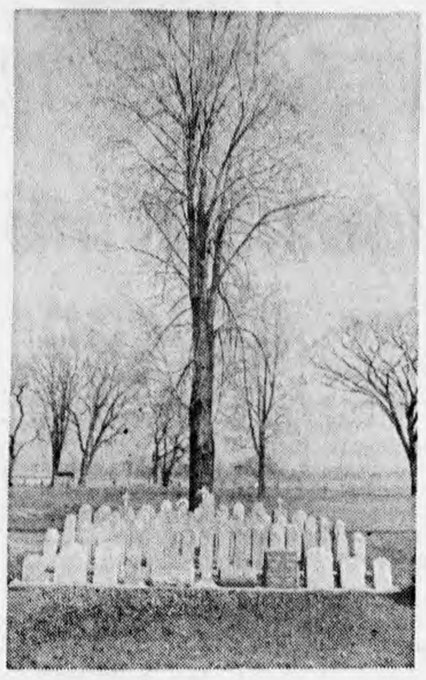


In memoriam . . .
Gravestones gathered in the churchyard

Story and photos by Ken Behrend P-G Staff

Namur's signs astride Highway 57 show its heritage

Namur— the Dream Vanished

NAMUR — Whatever happened to National Belgian Village?

The prospect of perpetuating Belgian customs with construction of a museum, hotel, a home for the aged and many more dreams rated page-one news in 1962 for people of this small Door County community. But like yesterday's soap bubble, their dreams vanished. Money was the mortar lacking for the foundation of this proposed tourist attraction.

Louise Alexander, third generation Martin, deeded 40 acres of property three miles west of Brussels to George Baudhuin, vice-president of the National Belgian Village Foundation. The sale included a tavern and dance hall and was renamed, appropriately, Belgian Inn. Headstones at an old cemetery next to St. Mary's of the Snows Catholic church were gathered and condensed to improve the view and a large sign was erected announcing the coming of Villa Madonna. Nothing more ever happened.

Like a motion picture production, the location was established, the script was carefully written, but the plot apparently didn't appeal to moth-eaten pocketbook holders and Old Belgium, U.S.A., was "gone with the wind."

The title, however, would remain after being lost for 57 years to the American title of Fairland. Walloon Belgian immigrants settled here in the mid 1850's. Merchant Clement Geniesse was appointed postmaster in 1872 naming his station Namur. But in 1905 a chairman of the Town of Union, who probably wasn't of Belgian ancestry, changed the name to Fairland. Officials of the N.B.V. convinced the highway department of their dreams and the favor was granted to rename the settlement Namur.

Chaudoir's Dock, familiar to perch fishermen on Green bay's east shore, was the site of the Geniesse general store and post office, according to Harry Chaudoir, who has a way with remembering dates even prior to his 72 years.

A telephone conversation between Joe Destree, owner of Caudoir's since 1945 and "Uncle Harry," concerning history of the one-time shipping port, had the flavor of chewing tripp (Belgian sausage) and trying to yodel in the same breath. The French phrases were punctuated with dates spoken in English. The latter was grasped and jotted on paper for later interpretation.

Uncle Harry remembers well the Denissen fleet, skippered by Theodore and Willie Denissen, which served the waterfront ferrying shingles and lumber from the Eli Chaudoir mill and farm products across the bay. The boats were named in honor of the captain's parents — John and Nettie.

It wasn't until 1935 that John Chaudoir built the first tavern at the dock, now owned by Destree and his wife, who have expanded the business with a trailer park and campground.

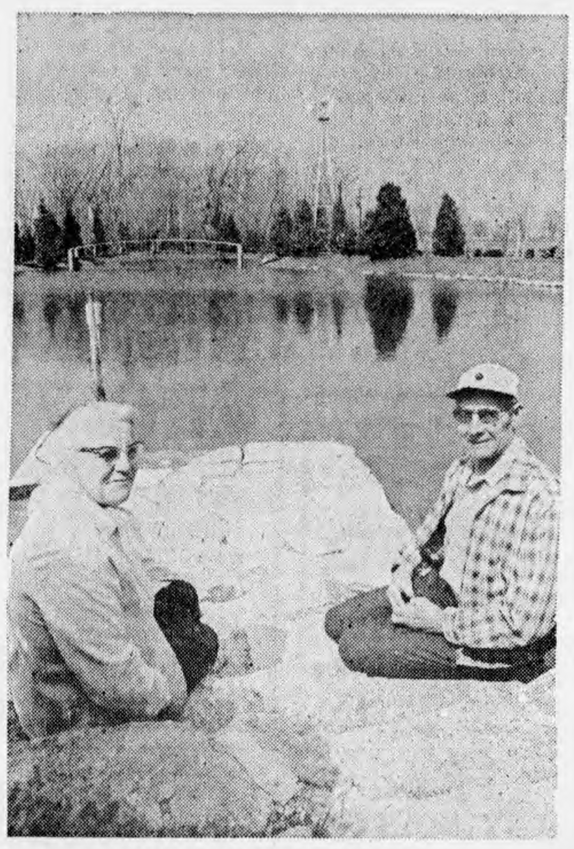
Something happened in 1895 and also in 1900, but the translation was swallowed in a desperate gasp for breath. A chat with Harry about this lost bit of history revealed a house had been built on the bay later than 1895 but before 1900. Oh, well.

Prompted by this native historian to visit with Harvey Jeanquart and his wife, Harry's sister, at their "natural" wildlife retirement haven was appealing to the appetite of a winter-weary outdoorsman.

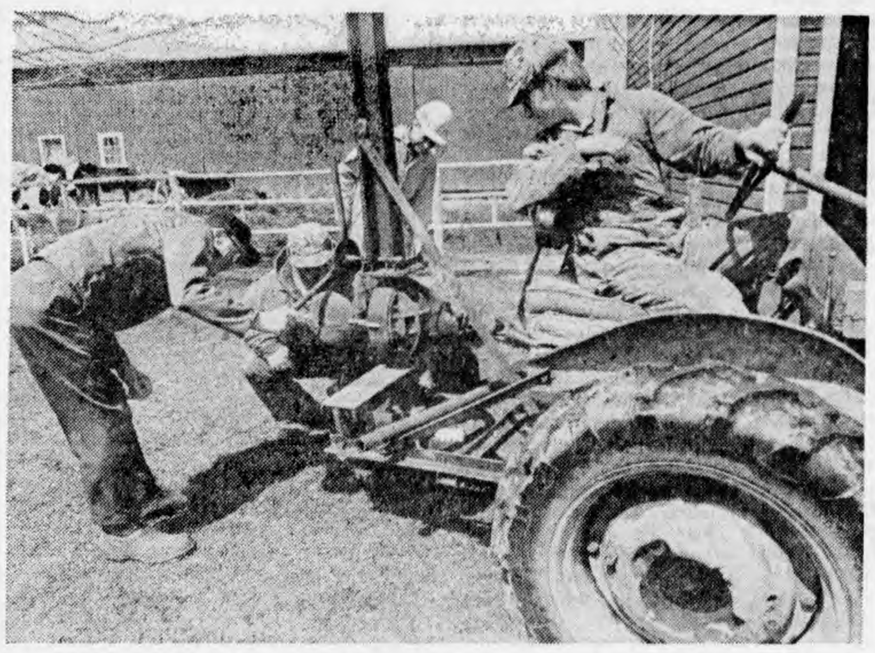
The "back-forty" sports a man-made lake complete with trout and smallmouth bass, surrounded by trees and shrubs, part of a planned landscaping. A windmill pumps water into the 225-foot long spring fed lake when it is essential to maintain a level during the summer. The area is frequently visited by school children. The bliss, however, has been interrupted by sapsuckers, which have added to their menus a sampling of the siding on Jeanquart's second home. The small pine trees and rough siding appear "bullet riddled" from overzealous hammering by these birds.

Meanwhile, back on the farm, there stands a bake oven and summer kitchen, still operable, that reflects Belgian culture, as does a small chapel along highway 57, property of the Baudhuin family. It was in Namur that the late Abbot Bernard J. Pennings, founder of the Norbertines in the United States, first settled.

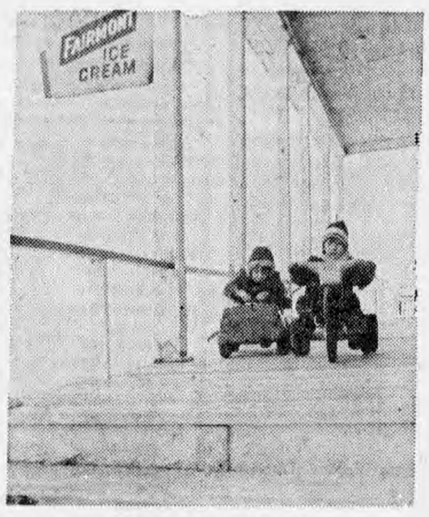
A sprinkling of houses and four roadside "watering stations" greet the traveler along this section of highway 57 north of Green Bay. First to be recognized is the Pines. Donald and Florence Allsteen operate the establishment. He has been blind for nine years and just last year lost both legs. Artificial legs have put Don back on his "feet", competing with neighboring tavern owners at Louise's, Jack's and Weidner's. Two other taverns on the highway have succumbed to fire. Au revoir.



Man-made lake
The Harvey Jeanquarts show off their ponds

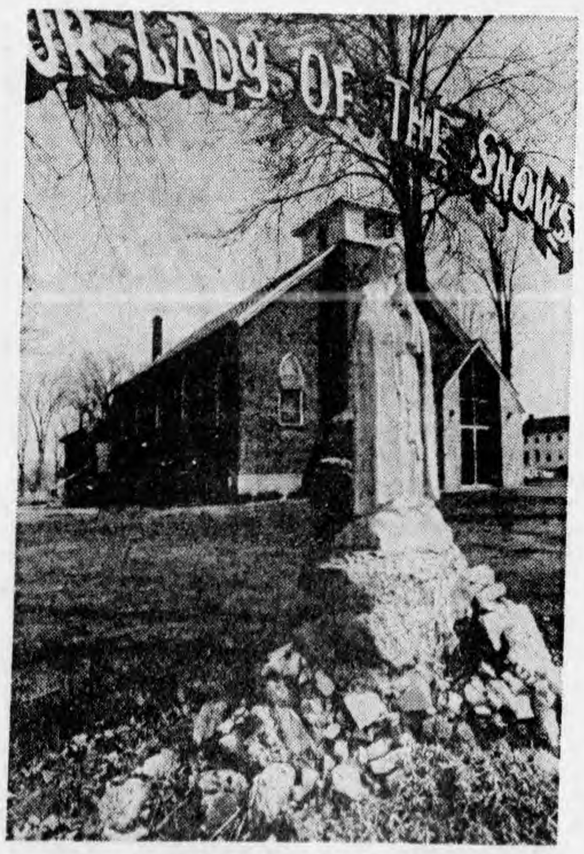


They plant holes — in the ice
Harry Chaudoir, left, Leonard Lampereur, Romie and David Chaudoir check out an ice auger

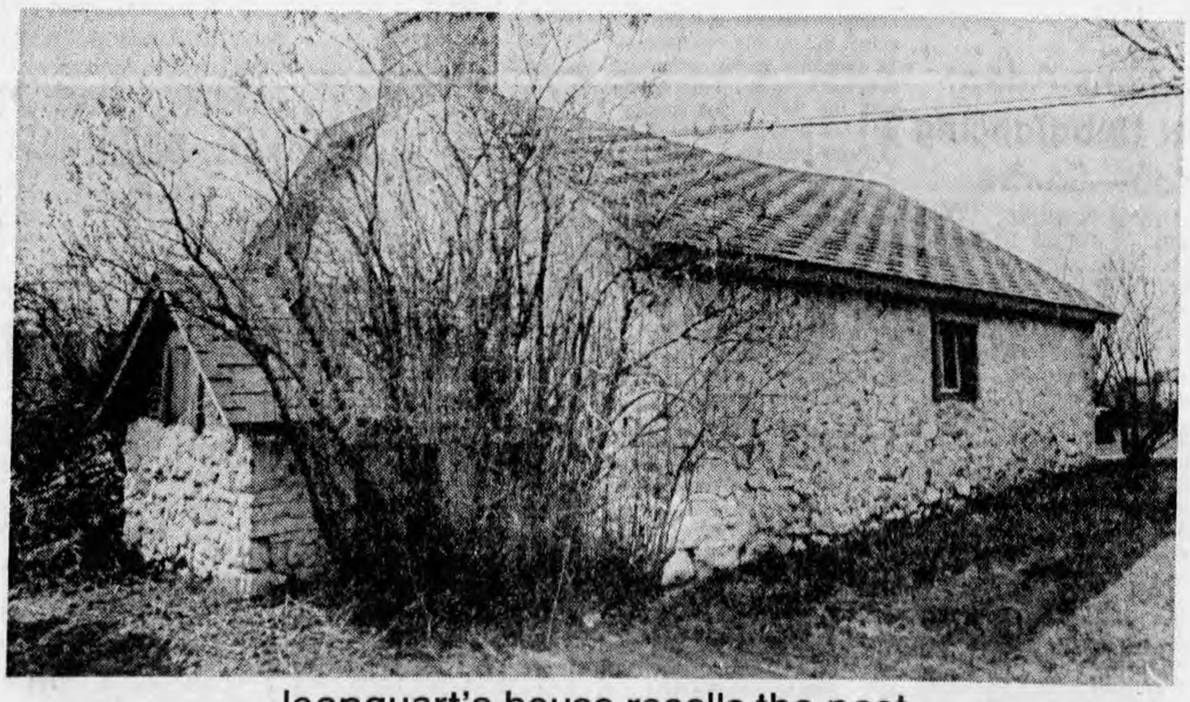


Porch play
Eric and Kirk Delwiche play at the old general store

The lifestyle allows for a refreshment stop
Louise Alexander bartends for Charles Matthews, Eli Vandertie and Adam Jadin



Catholic church
Our Lady of the Snows a central Namur point



Jeanquart's house recalls the past
The old-fashioned building has retained a bake oven and summer kitchen